

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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MINNESOTA HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM SIGNUP ANNOUNCED

Program Will Improve Wildlife Habitat in Wabasha Bluffland Forests

St. Paul, MN., March 7, 2008—USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Minnesota State Conservationist today announced the signup for the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) from March 17, through April 4, 2008. The program will protect and enhance forested wildlife habitat for declining populations of fish and wildlife.

“Through this effort, NRCS will help private landowners who are working to restore and enhance forest ecosystems and promote the restoration and conservation of declining wildlife species on private forestlands,” said Hunt.

Eligible private forest landowners in the Wabasha Blufflands Area of Wabasha County, Minnesota can apply for HFRP at the Wabasha NRCS field office. Applications will be prioritized according to ranking criteria which includes the protection or enhancement of habitat of the threatened Timber Rattlesnake and Blanding's Turtle as well as other identified declining wildlife species and targeted ecosystems. HFRP will also be used to improve biodiversity of woodland and wetland habitats for other State listed species of concern such as the James Sedge, Goldies Fern, Cliff Goldenrod, Wood Sedge, American Ginseng, Moschatel, Snow Trillium and the Louisiana Waterthrush.

“The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), authorized by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, is a voluntary program established for the purpose of restoring, protecting and enhancing forest ecosystems to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, improve biodiversity and enhance carbon sequestration” said Hunt.

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To be eligible, interested landowners must develop a forest management restoration plan that includes the implementation of conservation practices necessary to restore, protect and enhance forested habitat for selected species listed as a threatened or endangered species, a candidate species for listing, or a state species of special concern. NRCS will provide technical assistance to help participants develop and implement their HFRP forest management restoration plans.

Three enrollment options will be available to eligible landowners: a 10-year cost-share agreement where the landowner may receive 50 percent of the average cost of approved conservation practices; a 30-year easement where the landowner may receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 75 percent of the average cost of approved habitat conservation practices, or an easement of not more than 99 years where the landowner may receive up to 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus up to 100 percent of the average cost of approved habitat conservation practices.

For additional information on HFRP, contact the Wabasha USDA Service Center or visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/HFRP/ProgInfo/HFRPProgramInfo.html>

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.